

Wilderness News

FROM THE QUETICO SUPERIOR FOUNDATION SPRING 2002



The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico Superior region.

“Here [in the Quetico] the values of aboriginal society and of white society are merging to ensure that there will be a wilderness to pass on to our children and to their children. Knowing the past, they will want to honor, respect and take care of it.”

– Shirley Peruniak



Wilderness News

Published by the Quetico Superior Foundation
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Design: Eaton & Associates Design Company

Printed on 100% recycled paper with soy-based inks



Horne Falls area on the Pigeon River

Preserving Wild Country Along the Pigeon River

By Diane Rose, Wilderness News Contributor; Photography by Tom Duffus

The Nature Conservancy of Minnesota is making two land purchases that will help preserve the scenery, history and unusual ecosystem of the Pigeon River border area between Minnesota and Ontario.

In early March – with help from its independent partner, Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Ontario Provincial Parks and a Quetico Superior Foundation contribution – the Conservancy purchased the last unprotected seven miles of river frontage on the Canadian side of the river from the Purnell family of Milwaukee. The 750-acre purchase, known as Horne Falls, extends from LaVerendrye Provincial Park to Middle Falls, where it adjoins Ontario’s Pigeon River Provincial Park.

The partners in the transaction plan to work with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to turn Horne Falls over to Ontario Provincial Parks within the next year. The Nature Conservancy and its supporters will contribute half the cost of the project. Ontario Provincial Parks will contribute the other half through an agreement with NCC to add ecologically significant parcels to the parks.

Both sides of the river have stately pine forests and Rove shale formations. Known as Rove Hills, these formations have sheer cliffs of exposed soft shale on their northern slopes. They provide habitat



The Nature Conservancy is working with their Canadian counterpart to preserve the last unprotected areas along the Pigeon River.

for plants typically found in alpine and arctic ecosystems, including an assortment of ferns and woodsia, also known as rock ferns. Some of the plants are quite rare, including: encrusted saxifrage, an herbaceous plant with small cream-colored flowers; warty-fruited fairy bells; and sticky locoweed, a legume with purple flowers.

“This is very beautiful, wild, spectacular country,” said Tom Duffus, northeast Minnesota program director for The Nature Conservancy. “Our goal is to protect the watershed and unique habitats that make

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this one of the Great Lakes' last great places. We want to help heal and protect the river and its biodiversity for future generations.”

An example of challenges associated with the parcels, Duffus said, is that historic logging has reduced the number of conifers in the area. That has resulted in soil erosion, faster snow melt and rapid fluctuations in water levels. Restoration of the forest and trail management to safeguard plants from trampling are two of the Conservancy's goals for the area, he said.

The areas that The Nature Conservancy has purchased are part of the Canadian Heritage River system and the historic Voyageur Waterway. In the 1700s and 1800s, this was known as the Grand Portage trading route and was a key waterway used by the French and British explorers and fur traders. For centuries before that, it was an important travel route for the Cree, Assiniboin Dakota and Anishinaabe (Ojibwe or Chippewa) peoples. Logging and river drives became the dominant activity in the early 1900s, and today the area is a favorite wilderness destination for campers, canoeists and hikers.

Most of the land along the waterway, which includes a series of border lakes and the Pigeon River, has long been protected in parks, state forests and other public lands. To the south of the waterway, from west to east, are the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Grand Portage State Forest, Grand Portage Indian Reservation and Grand Portage State Park. To the north are Quetico Provincial Park, LaVerendrye Provincial Park and Pigeon River Provincial Park.

The Conservancy also plans to purchase the last unprotected stretch of property on the American side of the river. The 100-acre parcel includes approximately one mile of river frontage on the U.S. side, and would complete the chain of protected lands on both sides of the border lake country. □

LaVerendrye Provincial Park

Named for an early explorer, LaVerendrye Provincial Park offers backcountry camping, and a walk on the Canadian side.

LaVerendrye is a Waterway Provincial Park spanning the distance from Saganaga Lake at the eastern end of Quetico Provincial Park to the lower falls on the Pigeon River. The waterway runs along the Canadian side of the Minnesota/Ontario border, and connects Quetico Provincial Park to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Once part of an historic fur trade route, today LaVerendrye is part of the Canadian Heritage River system. It encompasses scenic cliffs, mesas and waterfalls, and protects several types of rare and unusual plants. The Height of Land that crosses the park between North and South Lakes is the point where water flows eastward to the Atlantic and westward to the Arctic Ocean.

Park Boundaries The Park's southern boundary is the International Border between Ontario, Canada and Minnesota. The northern boundary extends 200 yards inland from the shoreline along the majority of the Waterway.

Park Facilities and Activities There are no visitor facilities, but backcountry camping and car camping is permitted, and there are established trails and portages throughout the park. The park is used by canoeists, hikers, boaters, and fishermen, and offers winter activities including cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

Camping The park encourages low-impact camping, allowed at established campsites only. These sites can be found from Saganaga Lake, along the Granite and Pine Rivers, to North Lake.

LaVerendrye is classified as a 'Non-Operational Park' and no entry fees or permits are required. There is a limit of 9 individuals per campsite, though there is no quota for groups entering the park. Car camping is allowed on Mountain Lake and North Fowl Lake.

Access to the park is available on Red Sucker Bay on Saganaga Lake, Gunflint Lake, Mountain Lake, and North Fowl Lake.

Camping is not allowed in areas that are set apart to preserve rare plant species or natural earth formations; these areas are limited to hiking and backcountry travel. These 'Natural Reserve Zones' include the eastern tip of North Lake, the Arrow River, portions of North and South Fowl Lakes, and areas along the Pigeon River.

Park Management of Natural Resources

Commercial forestry and logging is not permitted within LaVerendrye. Campers are allowed to cut dead trees for campfires, and park officials may remove trees that are diseased or pose safety hazards.

Park waters are monitored to determine water quality. Certain lakes are stocked with fish, and fishery levels are studied and maintained – park officials work with the State of Minnesota to determine the length of season and catch limits.

Wild fires are suppressed within the park boundaries to protect the safety of visitors, and area residents.

The use of motorboats is allowed throughout the park, except in the protected 'Wilderness Area' from the Granite River to the entry of Magnetic Lake. Snowmobiles are allowed in limited areas, and motorized all-terrain vehicles and off-road dirt bikes are allowed in designated areas near main access points.

For More Information

Northwest Zone
Suite 221
435 James Street South
Thunder Bay, ON P7E6E3
Phone: (807) 475-1495
<http://www.ontarioparks.com/>

Book Review

Quetico Provincial Park: An Illustrated History

An historical chronology, and a treasure trove of photographs and anecdotes about the “family” of those who were passionate about the park, Shirley Peruniak documents the 1700s, when French and British explorers and fur traders first came into contact with the Ojibwe people, through the rise of lumber barons and gold mining in the late 1800s. She continues into the 20th century, detailing the era when Quetico Provincial Park came into being (1913) and the 1960s and 1970s, when tourists began visiting in significant numbers and debates raged over how and to what extent to protect the wilderness within it.

She writes: “In the late 60s and early 70s, Quetico would become the flashpoint for a province-wide debate: What is the purpose of a park? What should it be? Is it a reserve of resources, to be used if necessary? Or is a park a preserve, to be untouched in any way? Is resource use compatible with wilderness?”

Sprinkled throughout the book are amusing and intimate stories about the individuals and families who created the park’s human history – Native Americans, park staff, families who lived off the land and even people like American pilot/poacher C.R. “Dusty” Rhodes, who allegedly “bombed” the game warden’s headquarters with skinned beaver carcasses one winter during the 1920s.

Peruniak sheds light on many of Quetico’s biggest issues over the years, such as wildfire control, the tension between Native American rights and conservation policy, and the fact that Americans knew about and have always used the park to a much greater extent than Canadians. For most Ontario residents, the park is remote, even after construction of the Atikokan Highway in the 1950s.

Editor’s note: The book *Quetico Provincial Park: An Illustrated History* is available through the Friends of Quetico Park for \$34.95 Canadian, plus shipping and handling. The organization accepts mail orders accompanied by a check or a credit card number with expiration date.

The Friends can be reached at:

Box 1959, Atikokan

ON P0T 1C0, Canada

Phone: 807-929-2571, ext. 229

(May through September)

Phone: 807-929-9998 (October through April)

E-mail: friendsofquetico@nwon.com

The book is sold at park entry stations in the Friends of Quetico Park shops, and in the organization’s store at the Prairie Portage entry point. In addition, it is available through *The Boundary Waters Journal* and Piragis Northwoods Company, both in Ely. □



WILDERNESS PORTRAIT



Photograph by Jon Nelson

Shirley Peruniak

Preserving the Quetico Wilderness through Writing, Teaching, Mentoring

Shirley Peruniak answered the phone one early April afternoon at her home in Sharbot Lake, Ontario, and agreed to talk about her life and her recently published book, Quetico Provincial Park: An Illustrated History. But first, she was intent on describing a bird she’d been watching.

“I’m looking out my window right now, and I think it’s an immature trumpeter swan,” said the bird enthusiast, who served as Quetico’s Assistant Park Naturalist from 1979 to 1991. “I called everybody to come over and see it and I got out the telescope.”

It was easy to see how Peruniak, the garrulous bird enthusiast, was able to get people talking about the park and themselves. Over the years, those conversations turned into 300 hours of taped interviews – the foundation material for her book.

Although she has been “retired” for a decade, Peruniak apparently hasn’t slowed down or lost one iota of her enthusiasm for nature and wilderness protection. Every summer, she returns to Quetico Provincial Park as a volunteer to entertain and educate visitors with colorful stories and details about the park’s history and inhabitants. She has a lot of material to draw upon – 15,000 slides and the taped interviews collected during her years as a park staffer. Some of these aren’t yet catalogued and transcribed, and she said she’s found it’s fastest if she does this work herself. She also continues to conduct the park’s breeding bird census, which she launched more than 40 years ago.

Peruniak grew up in Sharbot Lake, nearly 1,000 miles from Quetico Provincial Park. She and her husband were schoolteachers. Her first canoe trip in the park in 1956 inspired them to move to Atikokan three years later with their two children. “I enjoyed the park work so much more,” she said. “People came to the park because they wanted to, while students go to school because they have to.”

Today, as a Quetico volunteer, Peruniak still canoes to her little cabin on Nim Lake, often with one of her two children, both of whom live elsewhere in Canada. And she continues to collaborate with the people of the Lac La Croix First Nation on a Quetico history project from the Ojibwe perspective. Federal grants have made it possible for Ojibwe students to canoe the park with Peruniak, study the information she collected over the years and then interview their elders and begin creating history albums from their people’s perspective.

Peruniak’s illustrated history, published in 2000 by the Friends of Quetico Park, combines a chronology of historical events spanning the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries with descriptions of natural beauty and a photo album and anecdotes about the park superintendents, rangers and some of Quetico’s colorful residents and visitors. Peruniak said the enthusiastic response of current and former park staffers to the book has been “wonderful.”

“Protecting wilderness is one of the hardest things there is; it’s an ongoing struggle,” Peruniak said. “The numbers of people are an incredible thing to try to cope with. Fortunately in Quetico, we got a (visitor) quota system before the numbers got too big. Now there’s a motor boat ban, which is a step in the right direction. Restricting group size is a difficult issue, because you want young people to have an enjoyable experience. You need good leadership for the youth camp groups.”

She recalled one spectacular morning on Argo Lake with a group of Ojibwe children, remarking how each member of the group was in awe of the beauty surrounding them. “Those are the treasures you hope people can experience.” □

– Diane Rose, Wilderness News Contributor

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Spring 2002

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BWCA & Quetico Permits

As the weather warms and the earth greens, wilderness enthusiasts' thoughts turn to canoeing, camping, and securing a permit. With more than 200,000 visitors a year, the BWCA is one of the most heavily used wilderness areas in the country. Quetico Provincial Park, on the other hand, has approximately 30,000 visitors each year. It promises more solitude, but potentially more difficulty securing permits.

Many people use outfitters to obtain the necessary permits and to handle other details of their wilderness trips. For those who prefer the do-it-yourself approach, the following is a rundown of some of the latest requirements.

Boundary Waters Canoe Area

A reservation assures a visitor of a permit to enter the BWCA on a specific day at a certain entry point. Permits are required for both day and overnight visitors. Permit reservations are recommended between May 1 and Sept. 30. Applications for the coming season that are submitted before Jan. 15 are processed in a lottery conducted on that date. After Jan. 20, they are processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Phone reservations are accepted from Feb. 1 through Sept. 1. Between Oct. 1 and May 1, people can make reservations and obtain permits the day they arrive in the BWCA.

Permit and use fees: A \$12, non-refundable reservation fee is required for each permit reserved, along with a \$20 deposit toward the overnight use fee. The deposit will be refunded if a reservation is cancelled two or more days before the entry date. The overnight use fee – charged from May 1 through Sept. 30 – is \$10 per person per trip for adults. The overnight rate per trip is \$5 for youth up to age 17 and for Golden Age or Golden Access Passport holders. Seasonal fee cards for overnight use are \$40 for adults and \$20 for children and Golden Age/Golden Access holders. User fees can be paid with the reservation fee or upon arrival at any Superior National Forest office as well as outfitters, resorts, camps, etc. Credit cards are accepted, and Forest Service permit stations also accept checks and cash.

Group size: The maximum size for each group is nine people and four watercraft.

Camping: Camping is allowed only at Forest Service-designated campsites that have steel fire grates and wilderness latrines. People may camp up to 14 days on the same site. Cans and glass bottles are not allowed, with the exception of those containing fuel, insect repellent, medicine and toiletries. All equipment, personal property and trash must be carried out at the end of the trip.

Fishing: Minnesota fishing licenses – available from county auditors, bait shops and canoe outfitters, are required. Fish remains must be buried 150 feet or more from the water's edge. State law prohibits putting the remains in the water.

Quetico Provincial Park

Permits can be reserved five months in advance of the entry date. Like the BWCA, they ensure your entry to the park on a specific date, and at a specific entry point.

Permit and use fees: The permit reservation fee is \$6 (Canadian) The overnight usage fee – in effect from May 20 through Sept. 4 – is \$12 (Canadian) per adult per night for U.S. citizens, and \$8 for Canadians. For youths up to age 17, the rate is \$5, and children under age 6 may camp for free. In addition, Canada Customs requires that all U.S. visitors obtain a Remote Area Border Crossing permit or CanPass – in advance and by mail – to enter the Province of Ontario. The cost per person is approximately \$22 (U.S.).

Group size: The limit is the same as the BWCA – nine people per campsite.

Camping: Quetico does not maintain designated campsites. Campfires must be built on bare rock or bare mineral soil at least five feet from flammable materials. Can and bottle restrictions are the same as in the BWCA.

Fishing: Ontario fishing licenses, available at all Quetico ranger stations or from bait shops, resorts and outfitters, are required. □

Permits are available via the Internet, fax, mail or phone:

BWCAW Reservations

P.O. Box 462
Baliston Spa, NY 12020
Phone: 1-877-550-6777
Fax: 1-518-884-9951
www.bwca.org

Quetico Reservations

1-888-668-7275 (for U.S. citizens)
www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/parks/quet.html

Lack of Prescribed Burning in the BWCA Could Spell Disaster this Summer

According to sources at the U.S. Forest Service and the Minnesota DNR, planned prescribed burns in the BWCA have been thwarted again this spring. This makes three consecutive periods of planned prescribed burns unaccounted for, increasing the probability of a major wild fire in the BWCA.

According to Jean Bergerson of the MN DNR, "first came the rains, then the conditions turned dry quickly and put things out of their prescription. There was only a window of a couple days when conditions were right. Hopefully we are not in the midst of the summer we have been dreading for three years. Time will tell."

The northern third of Minnesota remains in elevated fire danger due to a long-term lack of rainfall, below normal winter snow fall, and later than normal green-up conditions. In addition, the area did not receive measurable rain in May, resulting in the Forest Service instituting Level 2 Fire Restrictions.

As of the end of May, the DNR was unable to carry out the prescribed burns (4,900 acres) planned for this spring in the area affected by the 1999 blowdown. In our next issue we will look in depth at why the plans for prescribed burning have gone awry. □